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ABSTRACT

Presenting the Baby Boom (1946-1965) as both a potential social problem and opportunity for American leadership, this monograph discusses the following aspects of this population concern: (1) its immediate and long-term impact on career opportunities for those college graduates who make up the baby boom generation; (2) its impact on those whose competitive positions will be significantly affected by the entry of the baby boom generation into the work force; and (3) the potential social implications of the baby boom and its resulting overpopulation of many areas of the labor market. Placing emphasis on what individuals can do to avoid or mitigate the personal effects of the baby boom's undesirable and overwhelming influence on the labor market, the author encourages realistic and strategic career planning and mandates for new guidance techniques, while he discourages a liberal arts education and unrealistic expectations by both parents and students. (BM)

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BABY BOOM EQUALS CAREER BUST

by

Charles Guy Moore, Ph.D*
Economist
Executive Director
National Institute of Career Planning

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

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*The author can be reached through the Institute's offices at 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

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BABY BOOM EQUALS CAREER BUST

In order to understand today's high unemployment rate, we must examine the ultimate social implications of the postwar "baby boom" (1946-1965). More than 27 million more babies were born during these 20 years immediately following World War II than during the previous 20 years (79.5 million births 1946-1965 versus 52.4 million births 1926-1945).[1] *Today the job market is being overwhelmed by these babies half of whom are now young adults seeking work in record numbers.*

This year nearly two million more Americans will celebrate their twenty-first birthday than did a mere 20 years ago in 1957 (4.2 million versus 2.3 million).[2] There has been a parallel increase, of course, in the number of first time job seekers trying to enter the work force. The resulting competition has produced what can accurately be termed a career bust that is particularly severe among college graduates due to the fact that so many more young people are pursuing a college education today.

The graduating college class of 1974 totaled 1,008,654 graduates–more than 3½ times as many as the class of 1955 which totaled only 287,401 graduates.[3] Three quarters of a million college graduates were forced into clerical, service, and blue collar occupations between 1970 and 1974[4] because there weren't enough college-level jobs to go around. The Labor Department expects that another one million surplus college graduates will have been produced by 1985.[5] The present career bust and persistently high unemployment rates are likely to continue throughout the 1980's unless bold social measures are initiated to find meaningful work for the second half of the baby boom generation due to enter the work force between now and 1990.

This lay report deals with the following aspects of the Baby Boom: 1) It's immediate and long-term impact on career opportunities for those college graduates who make up the baby boom generation (born roughly between 1946-1965); 2) It's impact on those whose competitive positions will be significantly affected by the entry of the baby boom generation into the work force; and 3) The potential social implications of the baby boom and its resultant career bust. Emphasis will be placed on what individuals can do to avoid or mitigate the consequences of the baby boom's career bust on themselves. It is important to note that the figures quoted in this report are drawn without exception from official U.S. Government sources.

The Magnitude of the Problem: "Like Throwing all of Canada Onto the American Job Market"

An insight into the magnitude and potential significance of the baby boom can be grasped by imagining that someone transformed the entire Canadian population into young people. Imagine the strain that would be placed on our job markets if *each* year beginning in 1970, more than one million of these Canadians moved into the U.S. looking for work, until by about 1985 there would not be a single person left in all of Canada. These are nearly the exact proportions of the postwar baby boom and the magnitude of its impact on the U.S. labor market.

The Canadian government estimated its population at just under 22.7 million in 1975.[6] As a result primarily of the baby boom, the American labor force is expected to expand by 21.8 million people between 1970 and 1985 alone. Another 4.9 million people will be added to our work force during the late 1980's as the last of the baby boom generation tries to squeeze into the job market.[7]

The generally souring effects of the baby boom on the job market have been noted by former Assistant Secretary of Labor, Arnold Weber, who says the baby boom "will move through the labor force like a pig through a boa constrictor."[8] (Our particular focus in this report will be on the labor market for college graduates. This segment of the labor market is being especially hard hit due to the fact that so many in the baby boom generation are choosing to attend college.)

In 1955, approximately 12 percent of the college-age population was completing four years of college.[9] By 1974 those babies born during roughly the first third of the baby boom years were old enough to attend college and 26 percent of them were completing their bachelors degrees.[10] The percentage of young people completing college had more than doubled in less than 20 years! This tremendous increase in graduates coupled with the fact that the baby boom constituted only a transitory increase in population is what has caused the great oversupply of college graduates now trying to fit into our glutted job market.

Career Bust Magnified Because Population Increase Was Transitory

Many of the baby boom's worst problems—especially for those who make up the baby boom generation—result from the number of births spurting up by 50 percent for 20 years and then suddenly contracting back to near their former level.[11] If our population had continued to grow or if births had merely held steady at the higher postwar level, we would not have had nearly

as many difficult, long-term problems. The transitory, on-again-off-again nature of the postwar baby boom has created and will continue to create a great deal of additional havoc as the babies in this generation grow older and older.

The needs and demands of people change with their age. As the people in the baby boom generation (BBG) grow up, they create boom times for the institutions and industries that must grow to meet the needs of this enlarged bubble of population. They first created boom times for baby food makers, toy manufacturers, and grade school educators. The problem is, however, that in every case these boom times are transitory. Twenty years after these booms begin, they suddenly end and the affected industry experiences a painful contraction as the BBG outgrows the need for its products and services. The last of the BBG, for example, has already passed through the lower grades leaving many empty classrooms and surplus teachers in its wake.

The Teacher Surplus: A Direct Consequence of the Baby Boom

The passage of the baby boom generation (BBG) through our educational system provides particularly lucid examples of this demographic phenomenon's direct impact on career opportunities for: 1) individuals outside the BBG; and 2) those individuals who are part of the BBG. Because the BBG was 1½ times the size of the generation that preceded it, its entry into our schools created a need for half again as many teachers. This resulted in a very favorable market for teachers born before 1945.

Twenty years later, however, as the first waves of college graduates from the BBG began spilling out of the end of our educational pipeline, the bottom had already begun to fall out of the market for teachers. The teaching market was tightening up because our grade schools were already experiencing the painful contraction that followed the passage of the last of the BBG through the beginning of the educational pipeline. The BBG had produced a career boom for the generations that preceded it followed by a career bust for the members of the BBG who wanted to enter the very profession the BBG had earlier sent into boom times.

Unfortunately, what has happened in the market for teachers is not an isolated example of the BBG's impact on career opportunities. Ironically, this pattern of producing a career boom for other generations followed by a career bust for its own generation is also typical of the BBG's impact on career opportunities in many other areas. The exact same pattern has operated in baby foods and toy manufacturing. This pattern is being repeated again today in the market for college teachers. The BBG will produce its ultimate series of career booms for the generations behind it as those in this generation leave the work force creating a record number of job openings followed by booms in

retirement home sales, nursing homes, and a final career boom for morticians during the early part of the next century.

Postwar Prosperity Helps Produce Career Bust for Nearly Two Million College Graduates

The prosperity we experienced during the postwar period made us wealthier faster than at any other time in our history. Beginning in 1941 from a base that was already the world's highest, the average American's real income (after adjustment for inflation) more than doubled by 1972 (up 109 percent).[12] A better educated work force was correctly seen as a major reason for our increased wealth. Consequently, we put more and more money back into education in order to keep our prosperity machine running.

The total amount spent on higher education increased more than 60 fold between 1940 and 1975.[13] In the ten years between 1965 and 1975 alone, total spending on higher education skyrocketed from 12.7 billion to 44.9 billion—an increase of 350 percent in just 10 years time.[14] The percentage of high school seniors going on to college climbed steadily from 35 percent in 1940 to over 60 percent by 1975.[15]

It took our colleges and universities considerably less than the first four years of the 1970's to produce more graduates than they had during all of the 1950's combined. Although the demand for college graduates grew rapidly, it couldn't match this pace. By the early 1970's, the career bust that began with teachers had spread rapidly to engulf most of the other job markets for college graduates as well.

By 1974 the Labor Department reported that 750,000 surplus college graduates had already been forced into clerical service and blue-collar jobs.[16] The Labor Department estimates that we will produce another one million surplus college graduates by 1985.[17] It expects 140,000 surplus graduates alone from the class of 1980 that entered college in the fall of 1976 during our bicentennial year.[18]

False Assumptions Held by Many Parents and Students

The facts outlined above do not seem to be generally understood by college students or their parents. Most parents seem to automatically expect roughly the same advantages for their college-educated youngsters as those that accrued to the college-educated members of their own generation. Many parents and students alike view our recent recession as the reason why today's college graduates can't all find the caliber of employment to which they feel "entitled." While the recession has worsened matters, the real explanation is much more fundamental, long-term, and irreversible.

The technological revolution that began during WW II and accelerated later during the reconstruction years in which America was helping to rebuild Europe and Japan, produced an unparalleled demand for highly-educated technicians of virtually every type. This resulted in a chronic shortage in the supply of college-trained labor that persisted throughout the 1950's and all the way through the 1960's.

Although the supply of college graduates increased enormously during this period, the demand for college-trained labor also grew very rapidly and thus the shortage was never fully eliminated. Throughout this entire period a prosperous America experienced a growing need for college graduates and a college sheepskin acquired a reputation as an automatic ticket to a better way of life. By the late 1960's, however, it was already clear that the supply of college graduates was finally going to catch up with and surpass the demand for this category of labor.

Today's college graduates face exactly opposite supply and demand conditions than those their parents faced when they were of college age. There used to be more jobs for college graduates than there were graduates. Now there are more graduates than jobs that require college graduates. This condition will not change for at least another decade until the baby boom generation passes through our educational pipeline. Today we are experiencing a chronic oversupply of college graduates.

Entrance of Women Worsens the Career Bust

Although the number of women in our paid work force has continued to grow steadily throughout this century, it has shot up most dramatically since 1950. The number of women workers doubled between 1950 and 1974 and women now account for 39% or nearly two-fifths of all workers.[19] The generally increased seriousness of women in their career pursuits has been especially noticeable in the college job market.

Women have significantly increased the competition and thereby inadvertently contributed to the college job market career bust in at least four ways: 1) just as there are more people in the baby boom generation (BBG) there are also more women in this group; 2) a higher percentage of the women in the BBG are going to college—women constituted 45 percent of the college population in 1975 as opposed to only 31.6 percent in 1950;[20] 3) more of these women are not only entering the work force but also intend to remain permanently in it; and 4) as regards the college job market in particular, women are getting more of the top jobs.

A Lifetime of Severe Career Competition Is Projected for the BBG

Society is organized like a pyramid. College graduates occupy the managerial and other decision-making positions at the top of this social pyramid and are responsible for the pyramid's overall management and direction. Population growth normally results in a proportionate expansion in the number of positions at all levels in the pyramid including those at the top. The pyramid cannot expand proportionately, however, in response to a transitory increase in population as in the case of the recent baby boom. In order to see why, we shall look again at the boom/bust the baby boom generation (BBG) generated in the job market for teachers.

If population had continued to grow throughout the postwar era up even until today, brand new teaching positions would still be opening each year and these new positions could have absorbed at least part of the increase in the size of the graduating classes of the BBG. The fact that the teaching profession, traditionally the largest single employer of college graduates, did not expand but in fact contracted (see above), backed up the supply of college graduates and resulted in increased competition for the relatively few remaining non-teaching positions in the upper part of the pyramid.

There is an even more general and perhaps more easily understood reason why the social pyramid will not expand proportionately to accommodate the members of the BBG. The senior positions at the top of the pyramid tend to be occupied by our oldest, most experienced decision-makers. Upon retirement, these people tend to pass their powerful positions along to members of the generation closest to them in age and experience. The same principle operates at all levels of the pyramid with the result that power tends to be passed on to members of the next lowest generation. One's advance upward through the social pyramid is largely governed, therefore, by the passage of time which results ultimately in the retirement of those at the top. This in turn allows everyone to move up one level at a time.

Today the first wave of the BBG occupies the lower levels of the social pyramid. Those in the BBG must wait until those in the generation immediately senior to the BBG move up before they can advance in the pyramid. The rub comes, however, in the realization that despite its greater size, the BBG will inherit roughly the same number of managerial positions as were inherited by the much smaller generations that preceded it. Consequently, a much smaller percentage of the members of the BBG will be able to advance into higher positions. *Since people are always in closest competition for advancement with others their own age, the competition among those in the BBG will be much more intense and it will remain so throughout their careers*

because there will always be a relative abundance of competitors in this age group.

Which Apple? What Price? Fruit or Cider?

Anyone who's ever grown apples will tell you that their price from year to year is no indication of how good they are. In a year when the apple harvest is abundant, grade A apples sell for less than grade B apples in a poor harvest year when apples are scarce. This year's price of apples reflects their relative abundance or scarcity of supply this year. The very same impersonal market laws of relative supply and demand also determine how much college graduates can command for their services. Today's baby boom generation (BBG) graduate is part of a very abundant harvest of college graduates and his or her more modest salary reflects this fact.

The turnaround from a period of undersupply to one of oversupply of college graduates is most emphatically revealed in what has happened to the starting salaries of college graduates. In 1969, the starting salary of U.S. college graduates was 24 percent above that of the average American worker.[21] By 1972 the college advantage had slipped to 12 percent and it now stands at 6 percent.[22] Moreover, many recent college graduates haven't even found jobs that use their skills. This is also analogous to what happens to a few of the better apples in a year of abundant harvest.

Top grade apples are not usually crushed to make juice or cider. This does happen, however, in a year when the trees are overflowing with high quality apples not all of which can be sold as fruit. This is analogous to what has happened to the three quarters of a million college graduates who were forced into clerical, service, and blue-collar occupations between 1970 and 1974.[23]

It is clear, therefore, that the traditional advantages of better pay and more interesting work no longer automatically accrue to all college graduates. Yes, the very best students from the very best schools—the elite top 5 percent—can reasonably expect to automatically receive these advantages. Grade AAA apples are almost never used for cider. Those who make up the rest of today's college population run a serious risk of being "crushed for cider," however, unless they take some conscious steps to avoid this unpleasant fate.

Realistic, Strategic Career Plans Are a Must for Today's Student

More than a quarter of a million college students attend schools in the Boston area. Each year some of these students who want to go home for Thanksgiving fail to make it because the planes are all fully booked. Next June, as a result of failing to make adequate career plans, many thousands more of

these students will fail to get jobs that use their skills and make their college investment pay off in dollars and cents. This report should make it clear that the college job market (the plane in our example) is going to be overcrowded. Students who fail to "reserve a career position" for themselves early enough will miss a great deal more than turkey with the folks.

There are those who view going to college more or less as a business proposition and wouldn't choose to attend if they knew attending wouldn't ultimately pay off in the form of higher earnings and/or more interesting work. There are others who are attracted by these traditional benefits but would nevertheless attend even if they knew in advance that their degrees would not reward them with these benefits. These are value judgements that each must make for himself or herself.

The traditional advantages of a college education, while somewhat reduced in size, are still available. Assuring oneself of getting them, however, now requires a little advanced planning. Students can no longer realistically assume that they can blithely pursue whatever course of study they fancy and still be assured of getting a good job after graduation.

Today's Job Market Mandates New Guidance Techniques

Until very recently, there were more jobs for college graduates than there were graduates. Among the guidance techniques that gained widespread adoption during this period of plentiful jobs was the administration of batteries of psychological tests. The psychological profile that resulted from taking these tests was compared with those of people working in various occupations who had taken the same tests. The test taker was notified of the best matches and told, in effect, that he or she apparently stood a better chance of being happy in these occupations. This is where the counseling typically stopped.

Implicit in the reasoning of many who have relied on psychological testing is the assumption that if they could find the right occupation, the test taker would be able to find work in that occupation. Today, there are more graduates than jobs and the assumption that work will be available is no longer valid. Today, finding work is the hard part. Psychological testing is still valuable but the responsible counselor must go one step further. He or she must conduct a second search within the subset of occupations that appear "right" to find those in which the counselee also stands a realistic chance of finding work. Failing to take today's market realities into consideration constitutes a form of misguidance that exposes the counselee to great harm as is demonstrated by the following unfortunate example.

In the spring of 1976, thirty-year-old Joan McCormick decided to do something about the fact that she didn't like her job as an account executive

with an advertising firm. Joan, who had spent six years working her way up to this $24,000 position, desired a more "creative" outlet for her intellectual talents. In exchange for a $300 fee, she was given "a comprehensive battery of psychological tests and individual counseling." Based on her profile, the counseling firm recommended that Joan return to school to prepare for a new career in law, journalism, or college teaching. No one could have given her more unrealistic advice.

There has been an astounding increase in law school graduates in recent years. Law schools granted 30,000 diplomas in 1975—nearly double the 17,000 they granted just four years earlier in 1971.[24] As many as half of these recent graduates can't find jobs in the law profession.[25] As for college teaching, a glut of Ph.D.'s already exist. Furthermore, college enrollments are already dropping slightly and will inevitably begin a sharp nosedive in the early 1980's as colleges adjust to the reality that one million fewer people are now being born *each* year than during the baby boom.[26] Journalism, the field Joan chose to prepare for, is the worst of all three choices. There has been a 481 percent increase in journalism graduates since 1960.[27] The Newspaper Fund estimates that 20,000 journalism graduates from the class of 1978 will be chasing 5,600 jobs in this field.[28] Unfortunately, this is not a ficticious example.

The Job Market Is Worst for Liberal Arts Graduates

Two factors explain why students in the liberal arts face the highest probability of not finding good jobs: 1) there is an even greater relative oversupply of liberal arts graduates than of college graduates in general; and 2) given the increased availability of graduates, fewer employers appear willing to continue special training programs for liberal arts graduates.

Whereas overall college enrollments have grown by leaps and bounds, enrollments in the liberal arts have literally exploded. Between 1961 and 1971 overall enrollments increased 228 percent while liberal arts enrollments jumped 272 percent.[29] Overall enrollments are projected to increase by 272 percent whereas liberal arts enrollments are expected to nearly quadruple -increase by 379 percent -between 1961 and 1981.[30] Liberal arts graduates, who made up 42 percent of the class of 1961, made up 51 percent of the class of 1971 and are projected to constitute 58 percent of the class of 1981.[31]

Meanwhile, the relative demand for liberal arts graduates has fallen off. As was noted earlier, career opportunities in education, traditionally the largest employer of liberal arts graduates, have declined sharply along with the birth rate. And employers of all types are showing less interest in hiring and training the liberal arts graduate.

A 1974 survey by the College Placement Council showed that 76 percent of the employers surveyed hired less than 10 percent of their total new college hires from the liberal arts. Moreover, only about one-quarter of these employers had special programs to train liberal arts graduates.[32] Because of the present surplus of graduates, most employers appear able to fill all their openings without resorting to the expense of training the liberal arts graduate. Consequently, liberal arts majors are becoming disproportionately represented among the unemployed and the underemployed—those who are being forced to accept work for which they are overqualified. A recent study conducted at the University of Michigan indicated that as much as 27 percent of the nation's work force may ultimately be forced into underemployment.[33]

It has been argued that the broader, less specialized background one acquires from a liberal arts education can give one a competitive edge in coping with the rapidly changing nature of today's world. It is certainly true that our world is changing rapidly. It may also be true that the less specific nature of a liberal arts education produces students who are more adaptable and can adjust more easily to change. However, even if these assumptions are true, the fact is that they are of little relevance if employers won't hire these students in the first place. On the other hand, about three fourths of the employers in the College Placement Council's 1974 survey maintained that they would hire more liberal arts graduates "if they had certain business-related courses or if they had done co-op and other experimental work."[34] This may be a solution.

In any case, it is clear that the liberal arts student must take some realistic steps to make himself or herself attractive to employers after graduation. It must be emphasized that the route of continuing on to graduate school—especially in the liberal arts—may lead to even greater disappointments. Thousands of positions in college teaching are going to be eliminated very shortly as the last of the baby boom generation passes out of our colleges and universities. We've also discussed the employment situation for law school graduates and it is by no means unique among professional school graduates.

Bumping Has Spread the Career Bust to All Job Markets

Although a separate labor market exists for each of the Labor Department's over 35,000 different classifications of labor,[35] it is incorrect to think of each of these markets as being rigidly separated from the others. Rather, one should think of each of these markets as a single coil in a very large spring that constitutes the overall labor market. Forces that are applied to any one of the coils in this spring will ultimately be felt to some degree in all the other coils as well.

Better educated surplus workers often have a competitive edge in the job market because, if given a choice, many employers will hire the better educated applicant for a job. This employer preference has resulted in what has come to be known as the surplus M.A. "bumping" the B.A. out of a job, the surplus B.A. "bumping" the junior college graduate, the junior college graduate "bumping" the high school graduate and so on down the educational ladder. This type of bumping, which complies perfectly with our coil/spring analogy, has become widespread today. Examining where and how these patterns first developed provides valuable insights into how our labor markets function and why certain job market strategies work while others fail.

Teaching was the first professional field to experience a general oversupply of college graduates for two reasons. Teacher education has traditionally been the most popular college major. In 1969 when the teacher surplus first developed, 25 percent of all college students were enrolled in teacher education programs.[36] Consequently, the greatly enlarged classes of the baby boom rapidly produced a superabundance of qualified teachers. Second, as was noted earlier, by the time the first baby boom graduates were getting their degrees, the birth rate had already begun to return to its prewar level and teaching positions were beginning to be eliminated. Thus would-be teachers who were forced to look elsewhere for work became the first graduates to initiate the bumping process.

The teacher surplus began at 20,000 in 1969, climbed to 77,000 the next year, exceeded 100,000 annually by 1971 and is projected to continue growing through 1981.[37] Because they were so numerous, surplus teachers almost immediately bumped all the remaining markets for college graduates into a general condition of oversupply. By 1972, the starting salary advantage of college graduates over that of the average American worker had already been cut in half from its level in 1969[38] and jobs were hard to find. One result was that more students continued on to graduate school hoping thereby to gain a competitive edge in the scramble for good jobs.

Throughout the postwar period, the production of master's degrees has actually increased even more rapidly than that of bachelor's degrees. The number of master's degrees conferred grew from 74,435 in 1960 to 208,291 in 1970, an increase of 280 percent.[39] During this same decade, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred expanded from 392,440 to 827,234, an increase of only 211 percent.[40] The early 1970's, however, witnessed a sharp acceleration in this trend.

In 1972, an additional 43,342 masters degrees were conferred.[41] This raised the total to 251,633—nearly as many master's degrees as the number of bachelor's degrees that had been conferred just 17 years earlier in 1955.[42]

Meanwhile, law school enrollments practically doubled from 17,000 to 30,000 in the four brief years between 1971-1975.[43] Whereas the "bumping" process may give many of these new M.A.'s a competitive edge in the scramble for better jobs, it is not clear that bumping will work for those in Ph.D. programs where the oversupply is even larger.

Ph.D.'s: Victims of the Ultimate Career Bust

The general surplus of college graduates is most severe among those holding the Ph.D. In 1975 the Labor Department published a special Ph.D. manpower report that projected job openings for fewer than 1/3 of all new Ph.D. graduates through 1985.[44] Oversupply in this labor market is particularly worrisome in view of present employer attitudes regarding the value of this degree and those who hold it.

Between 1972 and 1985, the Department of Labor expects a total of 187,400 new openings for Ph.D.'s. During this same period, however, the supply of new Ph.D.'s pouring out of our graduate schools is expected to total 583,400. This means that nearly 400,000 of these new Ph.D.'s will not be able to find work suitable to their training.[45] It is here, at the top of our educational ladder, that the combined impact of the postwar baby boom and our dramatically increased commitment to higher education is most lucidly revealed by these two facts. Ph.D. production between 1972 and 1985 will be nearly twice as great as the total of all Ph.D.'s employed in 1972. Moreover, by itself, the number of surplus Ph.D.'s produced by 1985 will exceed the total number of Ph.D.'s employed in 1972 (334,600) by more than 60,000.[46]

In 1972, 70 percent of all Ph.D.'s were employed by educational institutions and fewer than 15 percent of these degree holders worked in business and industry.[47] Since college enrollments are declining, many new Ph.D.'s will have to find jobs elsewhere. Many employers, however, look upon the Ph.D. as strictly a research degree that has little value outside academic pursuits. Others view Ph.D.'s as impractical, overeducated types who are likely to be dissatisfied outside the classroom and thus might cause trouble within their own organizations. Some potential employers feel threatened by those who have more education than they have. Consequently, it is not at all clear that a Ph.D. gives one a competitive edge or "bumping" advantage with most non-academic employers.

Student's, Parent's Unrealistic Expectations Are Harmful

A large number of parents and students still do not realize that the baby boom has resulted in a long-term shift from undersupply to oversupply of college graduates. Many of these students continue to fallaciously attribute

their inability to find suitable work to solely transitory economic conditions like the recent recession. Many, if not most parents, continue to anticipate roughly the same advantages for their college-trained youngsters as those that accrued to the college-educated members of their own generation. These unrealistic expectations can be expected to result in an embittering harvest of unfulfilled hopes and disillusionment. As one consequence, many disappointed graduates may form equally as unrealistic self images of themselves as "losers." Enlightened counseling could significantly reduce the amount of psychological damage destined to be generated by these dashed expectations.

Baby boom graduates will begin to harbour more realistic career expectations if they come to better understand the adverse nature of their more competitive circumstances. This would enable them in turn to become more accepting of their fate. Life itself is a lottery. To have been born an American constitutes very good luck in the lottery of life. To have been born an American who is capable of completing college is even better luck, but nevertheless not quite as good luck if you happened to be born between roughly 1945 and 1965. This would be a much healthier, more realistic way for today's graduates to view their circumstances.

The realities faced by today's college students are quite different from those their parents confronted at their age. It is unrealistic and therefore potentially harmful for a young man who is the exact twin (in terms of ability and preparation) of his college-educated father to set his heart on achieving the same relative position in our social pyramid as that attained by his father. Sons like this are in a completely different numbers game. They must beat out 3½ times as many competitors in order to achieve their fathers' positions.

The relative competitive position of today's young women graduates is more difficult to evaluate. It is true that far fewer career fields were open to their mothers. On the other hand, many more men and still more women graduates are in the competition today.

In the past, going to college has more or less automatically improved the relative social positions of the comparatively few individuals who became college graduates. It should be clear, however, that everyone's relative position in our social pyramid could not be automatically improved in the extreme case where everyone went on to college. We have recently moved much closer to this extreme. The percentage of high school graduates continuing on to college has increased from 35 percent in 1940 to 60 percent in 1974.[48] As a result, the college advantage both in terms of salary and relative social position has been eroded for the average graduate. Another consequence is that these advantages are no longer automatic. Getting them now requires some planning. Today's students could form more realistic career expectations and better

adjust to the realities they confront if both these facts were made abundantly clear to them.

Does the Baby Boom Constitute a Social Problem or Opportunity?

America clearly has its share of major problems: environmental pollution, crime, excessively high pupil-teacher ratios, major shortages of such things as mass transit and housing, and the attendant intercity blight that both spawns and is in turn spawned by these conditions. I would include the baby boom among this growing list of problems. Some people believe the problems arising out of the baby boom have enough explosive potential to be the final straw to break America's back. Others, ironically enough, see in the baby boom the very ingredients needed to solve our most pressing social problems. Both outcomes seem to be possible. Which outcome is realized will depend upon how our leadership manages this potential problem/opportunity.

The baby boom problem was earlier compared to that of trying to fit the entire Canadian population into the U.S. work force. If we were involved in an all-out war, all available hands would be needed and we'd be delighted to have every Canadian join in the effort. Similar reasoning suggests that we enlist our surplus baby boom graduates in an all-out fight against the major social problems that presently threaten us from within.

The familiar phrase, "A mind is a terrible thing to lose", has been very effective in soliciting funds for higher education. Now that we've already invested billions educating our surplus graduates, wouldn't it represent an even more terrible waste not to make use of these minds that we've finally developed to the point of being productive?

The present opportunity to resolve our urban and environmental problems will not always be with us. America is becoming a nation of old people. Our birth rate has declined to the point that we are barely reproducing ourselves and we are living longer. In the future, therefore, a growing percentage of our young people will be needed to care for our aging masses and we won't have today's surplus of young people to work on our social problems. Consequently, if we don't solve these problems now, we may not have the necessary manpower to successfully grapple with them in the future.

The alternative of allowing this manpower to go unused is as dangerous as it is socially wasteful and callous. Several million embittered, disillusioned, underemployed and idle college graduates can not be expected to suffer quietly. If their needs for meaningful employment are ignored, the resultant social disruptions could indeed be enormous. Finding sociably valuable

work–not just jobs–for all the members of the baby boom generation ought to become a number one domestic priority of the Carter Administration.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Moore graduated from Lehigh University, attended universities in Europe and Africa for three years, and completed his graduate studies in Economic Theory at Northwestern University. His professional career spans both education and industry. He has taught on the faculties of four universities, received numerous research grants, and delivered and published a variety of professional papers and articles. He has held the post of Senior Economic Analyst at Exxon Corporation, acted as a general economic consultant to industry, and served as the Executive Director of the National Institute of Career Planning since 1973. Dr. Moore is the author of more than 70 published titles in the area of career decision-making, including his most recent book, *The Career Game*, which introduces economic considerations directly into the career decision-making process.

FOOTNOTES

[1]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*: 1960, 1965, 1975 editions, Washington, 1960, 1965, 1975.

[2]Ibid.

[3]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*: 1958, 79th edition, Washington, 1958 and National Center for Education Statistics, *Earned Degrees Conferred 1972-73 and 1973-74 Summary Data*, Washington, 1976.

[4]U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Projections and Training Data* (Bulletin 1918), Washington, 1976, p. 20.

[5]Ibid.

[6]*1976 World Almanac and Book of Facts*, New York, 1976, p. 697.

[7]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*: 1974 edition, Washington, 1974, p. 337

[8]Victor F. Zonana, "Battle of the Bulge," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 18, 1975, p. 1.

[9]Approximated by dividing the number of bachelor's degrees conferred in 1955 by the number of births in 1933 (figures taken from the sources cited earlier).

[10]Approximated by dividing the number of bachelor's degrees conferred in 1974 by the number of births in 1952 (figures taken from the sources cited earlier).

[11]Births in recent years have been averaging more than one million a year less than during the period 1955-1965.

[12]U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Handbook of Labor Statistics 1973*, Bulletin 1790, Washington, 1973, pp. 287, 403-404 (served as the source for the income data).

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*: 1972, 93rd edition, Washington, 1972, p. 5 (served as the source for the population data).

Figures were constructed by converting both years gross national product figures into constant 1967 figures, for which the consumer price indexes for all items were used; and then dividing these figures by total population including armed forces abroad to get annual per capita income in 1967 dollars for both years from which the percentage increase was computed.

[13]U.S. Department of HEW, *Digest of Education Statistics*: 1975 edition, Washington, 1975, p. 24, 125.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid, p. 14.

[16]U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Projections and Training Data* (Bulletin 1918), Washington, 1976, p. 20.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Richard A. Shaffer, "Down the Ladder," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 16, 1976, p. 1.

[19]U.S. Department of Labor, *1975 Handbook On Women Workers* (Bulletin 297), Washington, 1975, p. 9.

[20]U.S. Department of HEW, *Digest of Education Statistics*: 1975 edition, Washington, 1975.

[21]"Who Needs College?," *Newsweek*, April 26, 1976, p. 62 ,Source: Richard Freeman, *The Overeducated American).*

[22]Ibid.

[23]U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Projections and Training Data* (Bulletin 1918), Washington, 1976, p. 20.

[24]Rodger Ricklefs, "Back To Business," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 14, 1976, p. 1.

[25]Mike Tharp, "Cold, Cruel World," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 20, 1975, p. 1.

[26]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*: 1960, 1965, 1975 editions, Washington, 1960, 1965, 1975.

[27]Earl C. Gottschalk, Jr., "Hot On The Press," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 19, 1976, p. 1.

[28]Ibid.

[29]The College Placement Council, *Four-Year Liberal Arts Graduates*, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, p. 6,

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid, p. 9.

[33]Richard A. Shaffer, "Down the Ladder," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 16, 1976, p. 1.

[34]Ibid, p. 9.

[35]The Labor Department's *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* lists 35,000 different titles.

[36]National Education Association, *Teacher Supply and Demand In Public Schools, 1973*, Washington, 1973, p. 5.

[37]National Education Association, *NEA Research Bulletin 1971*, Washington, 1971, p. 71.

[38]"Who Needs College?" *Newsweek*, April 26, 1976, p. 62 (Source: Richard Freeman, *The Overeducated American*).

[39]U.S. Department of HEW, *Digest of Education Statistics*: 1975 edition, Washington, 1975, p. 89.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid.

[42]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*: 1958, 79th edition, Washington, 1958.

[43]Rodger Ricklefs, "Back To Business," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 14, 1976, p. 1.

[44]U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Ph.D. Manpower: Employment Demand and Supply 1972-85* (Bulletin 1860), Washington, 1975, p. 14.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid, p. 1.

[48]U.S. Department of HEW, *Digest of Education Statistics*: 1975 edition, Washington, 1975, p. 14.

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